



Women's Bible Study  
A Godly Response to Life's Realities: A Study in the Psalms  
Psalm 107: Thanksgiving  
November 15, 2006  
Lorie Dahlstrom

One week from today we will be busy with our preparations for Thanksgiving. Our study of Psalm 107 today will give us some "food for thought" from the Scriptures, to contemplate all we have to be thankful for. While Thanksgiving is a wonderful family holiday and time to celebrate God's bountiful blessings, being thankful shouldn't be relegated to one day of the year. Each of us should have a thankful heart full of gratitude and praise for what the Lord has done for us every day of the year----a daily "attitude of gratitude". As believers, our daily lives should be described as living thankfully, praising God for His blessings. If we change one letter in the word "thanksgiving" we have "thanks – living"----which would apply to every day of the year.

The commentary on Psalm 107 by James Montgomery Boice called this "The Pilgrim's Psalm". He says, "Psalm 107, more than any other portion of the Bible, aptly describes the many dangers, toils, and snares the pilgrims experienced prior to, during, and after their courageous crossing of the Atlantic Ocean to found America's Plymouth Colony. There is reason to believe they recognized this description themselves. Governor William Bradford in his account of the founding of the Plymouth Plantation explicitly referred to Psalm 107 in his well-known summation of their achievement:

*May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness, but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice and looked on their adversity... 'Let them therefore praise the Lord, because he is good: and his mercies endure forever.' Yes, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how he hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before the Lord his loving kindness and his wonderful works before the sons of men.*

Several phrases he used are direct quotes from Psalm 107, so it would seem that this was a psalm often read in worship. Psalms 105, 106, and 107 form a trilogy. Psalm 105 recounts Israel's experience from the time of God's covenant with Abraham to the people entering the promised land; Psalm 106 (which Jann taught a few weeks ago), recounts the unfaithfulness of the Israelites during this same time period and their years of exile in Babylon. In Psalm 107 the Israelites thank God for their deliverance from that exile.

The circumstances in this psalm were written to describe the experiences the Israelites went through during captivity. But, we can see how the Pilgrims would have loved this psalm because they could identify with these same troubles and as they read how the Israelites cried out to the Lord and he met their needs, which was an encouragement to them and gave them hope. Today we will look at these challenges described in Psalm 107 and see how they could apply to present day situations for us as well.

Many of the psalms were sung and this psalm resembles a hymn. It has 4 examples or stanzas that give word-pictures of different situations, followed by a repeated refrain like our choruses today. Each of the stanzas has a unique pattern that is repeated---calamity, distress, deliverance, and thanksgiving. Cries to the Lord for help are found in verses 6, 13, 19, & 28.

*Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

Thanksgiving praises to God for meeting their needs are found in verses 8, 15, 21, & 31.

*Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.*

God's solutions are different in each situation and we will look at them separately to see how we can apply them in our own circumstances.

Psalm 107 begins with an invitation to give thanks to the Lord. (vs1-3)

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from the east and west, from the north and south.*

### **Example # 1: Verses 4-9 - Crying Out To The Lord When You Have Lost Your Way**

*Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love, for his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*

From these verses we can see how the pilgrims identified with the plight of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, being thirsty, hungry, and homeless. They cried out and we see God's solution---He provides for their physical needs of thirst and hunger and "led them by a straight way (direct route, clear direction but not necessarily the shortest route) to a place where they could settle.

Have you ever felt like you were lost and wandering with no meaning and purpose? Maybe experiencing a "dry period" like we talked about in Psalm 34. You have felt thirsty and hungry for the Lord to reveal Himself to you and give you direction. Even though none of us have been homeless as we know it today, we may have been away from our true home which is God. Our life may have seemed aimless with no satisfaction. We cried out to the LORD in our distress and He rescued us, gave us direction and put us on His path that "satisfied our spiritual hunger and thirst with good things." Jesus is pictured in the NT as the Way, the Bread of Life, the Water of Life, and the Giver of rest. Only He can truly satisfy our needs for direction, nurturing and rest and we find our eternal home in Him.

In your life's journey have you taken time to consider God's sovereignty in the parents to whom you were born, the place you were raised, your childhood training, your education, your friends, your spouse if you are married, your children or extended family? Have you considered his

guidance and direction in your career, your life experiences, your spiritual gifts and natural talents, your areas of service in the church and community, and your spiritual growth?

**Personal Application**--Today will you thank the Lord for His direction and provision for you---your home, family, job, etc. and for “filling your life with good things”?

In answer to God’s rescue we have the refrain in verse 8.

*Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love, and his wonderful deeds for men.*

I would like to suggest we take the liberty of personalizing this refrain with “I” and “me” to make it our own prayer of thanksgiving.

*I will give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love, and his wonderful deeds for me.*

**Example # 2: Verses 10-16 - Crying Out To The Lord When You Are Bound By Sin**

*Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.*

We can visualize the Israelites exiled in Babylon feeling like they were in the wilderness, in the deepest gloom and suffering like prisoners with iron chains, subjected to bitter labor because they had rebelled against God’s counsel and commands. They cried out to the Lord and he delivered them from their bondage vs. 14, “he brought them out of the darkness and broke away their chains”.

The Pilgrim leaders could identify with this passage for they were often put in prison for dissenting from the established religion of the time, and when small groups tried to escape they were often arrested. We can’t really relate to being freed from the chains or bars of an actual prison. But we can become trapped in emotional, relational, financial or spiritual prisons of our own making. We can find ourselves in bondage and in the “deepest gloom” vs. 14. When we become imprisoned as a result of our own poor choices, we need only to cry out to God, who is the only one who can help us. In his power and mercy, he will break our chains and bring us out of darkness into the light of day.

Romans 8:2 says “...through Christ Jesus, the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” As believers Christ has freed each of us from the bondage of sin that held us captive before we received his gift of salvation. We had “rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High,” as it says in vs. 11. God, in his grace, has delivered us from the power of sin.

**Personal Application**--Will you thank God for His gift to you of salvation and the freedom you now enjoy ?

*I will give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love, and his wonderful deeds for me.*

### **Example # 3: Verses 17-22 - Crying Out To The Lord In Health Issues**

*Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.*

This example pictures people who “suffered affliction because of their iniquities” vs. 17. It describes sickness so severe that it brought those afflicted “near the gates of death” vs. 18. The Pilgrims could identify here as well, losing many of their men, women, and children to illnesses. In today’s world we have self-inflicted sickness due to drugs, alcohol, and unhealthy lifestyles. This psalm is not only talking about physical sickness but also spiritual sickness and God’s Word that brings healing (vs. 20---“He sent forth his word and healed them”). Only God’s word is alive and can bring life to the sickness of our spirit.

I am sure that there are a number of you in this room that are experiencing serious physical health issues. We so often take our health for granted and don’t appreciate the delicate balance of how wonderfully our bodies have been created by God. But let something go wrong and we are suddenly aware of how fragile we are and we find ourselves crying out to God for help. He meets our needs in a variety of ways. He doesn’t always heal us physically, but spiritually always gives us encouragement and the strength we need, when we need it in His perfect timing.

When my Dad was in his late 60’s he began to have some serious health problems. At the same time I was reading and learning about 1 Thess 5:18 “Give thanks in all things, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” I found it very difficult to be thankful for this problem. But I discovered the little word IN that made the difference in that verse. I didn’t have to thank God FOR my Dad’s heart problem---but, I could thank God IN the midst of the problem, because I knew He was in control and had allowed it for some reason. When I could give thanks IN this situation, it seemed like God’s power was released to work.

My Dad was not miraculously healed, He had open-heart surgery here at Mayo Clinic for a heart valve replacement and it was a “touch and go” procedure. Through it all, my Dad’s faith grew tremendously. He was a Christian, but didn’t speak openly about his faith. After he recovered He was able to share what God had done for him and how his faith was strengthened in this adversity. Needless to say, my faith grew significantly during this time as well.

In vs. 22 it says, “tell of his works with songs of joy”. Has the Lord healed you from some illness? Have you shared it with others? It doesn’t have to be something major. A couple of years ago we went out to Colorado to take care of our granddaughters while our daughter and husband were on a trip. On the way out I began getting a cold. Whenever I get a cold, or even the slightest sniffle, I ALWAYS get a “dry hacky” cough that keeps me up for many nights. The next day as the cold was progressing I prayed, “Lord, if it would be possible could I have this cold WITHOUT a cough? I can’t be up all night coughing and take care of a 2 yr old and a 5 yr old for five days. Do you know the Lord answered that prayer?? It’s the only cold I have ever had without my usual cough. Praise the Lord!!! God loves to have us give Him thanks for what He does in our lives---big or small.

**Personal Application---What health issues has the Lord used to increase your faith and give you reasons to praise and thank Him?**

*I will give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for me.*

#### **Example # 4: Verses 23-32 - Crying Out To The Lord When Tossed By The Storms Of Life**

*Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deed in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wit's end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress, He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.*

Being away from home and living as captives in Babylon, was to the exiles like being on a boat in a terrible storm. The Israelites were not a seafaring people but there are various references in the Old Testament to ships and storms (Isaiah 54:11 and Jonah 1). The Pilgrims could identify with this storm in their 65 day late fall crossing of the turbulent Atlantic Ocean. In the New Testament the gospels give reference to Jesus calming the water and winds in storms (Luke 8:22-25, Matt 8:23-27, Mark 4:36-41) Most of us here today have not experienced a storm at sea. But all of us have experienced the “storms of life”, the ups and downs that challenge our faith. I am reminded of the words from the hymn “Count Your Blessings”---“when upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed, when you are discouraged thinking all is lost---are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?” Maybe today some of you here are experiencing situations that have you at your wit’s end, and you are “crying out to the Lord in your trouble” and waiting for him to bring you out of your distress as in verse 28. Trust in the Lord and keep your focus on him no matter what your situation. Satan’s goal is to keep us so focused on our problems and the circumstances around us, we take our eyes off the Lord and try to find our own solution. Stand on God’s promises in his Word.

Isaiah 26:3 *“You will keep him in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.*

Isaiah 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

God answers the call of distress in the next couple of verses, “ he stilled the storm to a whisper--- and guided them to their desired haven, and they gave thanks.” We can join with John Newton in his famous hymn, “Amazing Grace”, in the words of the third verse to thank God for his gracious rescue in our lives.

*Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;  
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

#### **Personal Application What difficulties in the past year has the Lord brought you through by His grace?**

Verse 32 gives us an admonition—“Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.” Have you shared with anyone how the Lord has brought you through the “storms” in your life?” God can use a personal testimony powerfully for His glory.

*I will give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for me.*

### **ACCEPTING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY---verses 33-42**

In this section we have repeated cycles of adversity and blessing. We see adversity in verses 33-34 "He turned rivers into a desert; and in verses 39-40 "Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow". We see blessing in verses 35-38 "they sowed and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest, he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased"; and in verses 41-42 "he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks".

These verses focus on God's sovereign workings by which his people are sometimes lifted up and sometimes brought low. Life has its pain and tragedies, even for Christians. God's wise, loving, and sovereign hand can be seen even in the hardships.

Isaiah 55:11 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways."

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, and who have been called according to his purpose."

God's ultimate purposes in our lives are usually beyond our realm of understanding. Because he loves us, and gave his Son, Jesus to die for our sins, we can trust him to guide and direct our lives in whatever way is best. We can join with the prophet Habakkuk when he said, "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4)

Psalms 107 ends with verse 43 "Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord." The theme of this psalm is the love of the Lord. He has brought the Israelites out of exile and this psalm recounts and rejoices in his deliverance. In the first few verses is a call to give thanks "for his love that endures forever". In verses 4-32 are examples of this great love the Lord has for his people and verses 33-42 are instructions to consider this great love and accept his sovereignty, and in verse 43 to "be wise and heed these things".

Hosea 14:9 "The ways of the Lord are right, the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."

Throughout the Scriptures we are shown these two paths---obedience and rebellion. May we take this psalm and reread it and consider the great love God has for us and "be wise and heed these things" and walk in obedience.

I'd like to close with one of my favorite Thanksgiving stories I came across a few years ago. I like to read it each year about this time when I'm reflecting on what I have to be thankful for. It's added as a separate sheet on your notes so you can detach it and use it to share with someone this Thanksgiving.

### **Personal Application— What adversity or "thorn" will you be thankful for this year?**

*I will give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and for his wonderful deeds for me.*

## THANKSGIVING THORNS

Sandra felt as low as the heels of her Birkenstocks as she pushed against a November gust and the florist shop door. Her life had been easy, like a spring breeze. Then, in the fourth month of her second pregnancy, a minor automobile accident stole her ease. During this Thanksgiving week she would have delivered a son. She grieved over her loss. As if that weren't enough, her husband's company threatened a transfer. Then her sister, whose holiday visit she coveted, called saying she could not come. What's worse, Sandra's friend infuriated her by suggesting her grief was a God-given path to maturity that would allow her to empathize with others who suffer. "Had she lost a child? No---she has no idea what I'm feeling," Sandra shuddered. Thanksgiving? "Thankful for what?" she wondered. For a careless driver whose truck was hardly scratched when he rear-ended her? For an airbag that saved her life but took that of her child?

"Good afternoon, can I help you?" The flower shop clerk's approach startled her. "Sorry," said Jenny, "I just didn't want you to think I was ignoring you."

"I .....I need an arrangement."

"For Thanksgiving?"

Sandra nodded.

"Do you want beautiful but ordinary, or would you like to challenge the day with a customer favorite I call the

"Thanksgiving Special!" Jenny saw Sandra's curiosity and continued. "I'm convinced that flowers tell stories, that each arrangement insinuates a particular feeling. Are you looking for something that conveys gratitude this Thanksgiving?"

"Not exactly!" Sandra blurted. "Sorry, but in the last five months, everything that could go wrong has." Sandra regretted her outburst but was surprised when Jenny said, "I have the perfect arrangement for you." The door's small bell suddenly rang.

"Barbara! Hi." Jenny said. She politely excused herself from Sandra and walked toward a small workroom. She quickly reappeared carrying a massive arrangement of greenery, bows, and long stemmed thorny roses. Only, the ends of the rose stems were nearly snipped, no flowers.

"Want this in a box?" Jenny asked.

Sandra watched for Barbara's response. Was this a joke: Who would want rose stems and no flowers! She waited for laughter, for someone to notice the absence of flowers atop the thorny stems, but neither woman did.

"Yes, please. It's exquisite," said Barbara. "You'd think after three years of getting the special, I'd not be so moved by its significance, but it's happening again. My family will love this one. Thanks." Sandra stared, "Why so normal a conversation about so strange an arrangement?" she wondered.

"Ah," said Sandra, pointing. "That lady just left with, ah...."

"Yes?"

"Well, she had no flowers!"

"Right. I cut off the flowers."

"Off?"

"Off. Yep. That's the Special. I call it the 'Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet.'"

"But, why do people pay for that?" In spite of herself she chuckled.

"Do you really want to know?"

"I couldn't leave this shop without knowing. I'd think about nothing else!"

"That might be good." said Jenny

"Well," she continued, "Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling very much like you feel today. She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she faced major surgery!"

"Ouch!" said Sandra.

"That same year, I lost my husband. I assumed complete responsibility for the shop and for the first time, spent the holidays alone. I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel."

"What did you do?"

"I learned to be thankful for thorns."

Sandra's eyebrows lifted. "Thorns?"

"I'm a Christian, Sandra. I've always thanked God for good things in life and I never thought to ask Him why good things happened to me. But, when bad stuff hit, did I ever ask! It

took time to learn that dark times are important. I always enjoyed the ‘flowers’ of life but it took thorns to show me the beauty of God’s comfort. You know, the Bible says that God comforts us when we’re afflicted and from His consolation we learn to comfort others.”

Sandra gasped. “A friend read that passage to me and I was furious! I guess the truth is, I don’t want comfort. I’ve lost a baby and I’m angry with God.”

She started to ask Jenny to “go on” when the door’s bell diverted their attention.

“Hey Phil!” shouted Jenny as a balding, rotund man entered the shop. She softly touched Sandra’s arm and moved to welcome him. He tucked her under his side for a warm hug.

“I’m here for twelve long-stemmed stems!” Phil laughed, heartily.

“I figured as much” said Jenny.

“I’ve got them ready.” She lifted a tissue-wrapped arrangement from the refrigerated cabinet.

“Beautiful,” said Phil. “My wife will love them.”

Sandra could not resist asking. “These are for your wife?”

Phil saw that Sandra’s curiosity matched his when he first heard of a Thorn Bouquet.

“Do you mind me asking, ‘Why thorns?’”

“In fact, I’m glad you asked,” he said. “Four years ago, my wife and I nearly divorced. After forty years, we were in a real mess, but we slogged through, problem by rotten problem. We rescued our marriage—our love, really. Last year at Thanksgiving, I stopped in here for flowers. I must have mentioned surviving a tough process because Jenny told me that for a long time she kept a vase of rose stems—stems—as a reminder of what she learned from ‘thorny’ times. That was good enough for me. I took home stems. My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific thorny situation and give thanks for what the problem taught us. I’m pretty sure this stem review is becoming a tradition.”

Phil paid Jenny, thanked her again and as he left said to Sandra, “I highly recommend the Special!”

“I don’t know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life,” Sandra said to Jenny.

“Well, my experience says that thorns make roses more precious. We treasure God’s providential care more during trouble than at any other time. Remember, Sandra, Jesus wore a crown of thorns so that we might know His love. Do not resent thorns.”

Tears rolled down Sandra’s cheeks. For the first time since the accident she loosened her grip on resentment. “I’ll take twelve long-stemmed thorns, please.”

“I hoped you would.” Jenny said. “I’ll have them ready in a minute. Then, every time you see them, remember to appreciate both good and hard times. We grow through both.”

“Thank you. What do I owe you?”

“Nothing. Nothing but a pledge to work toward healing your heart. The first year’s arrangement is always on me.” Jenny handed a card to Sandra. “I’ll attach a card like this to your arrangement but maybe you’d like to read it first. Go ahead, read it.”

*My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorn! I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the glory of the cross I bear; teach me the value of my thorns. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow;*

**George Matheson**

Jenny said, “Happy Thanks-giving, Sandra,” handing her the “Special.” I look forward to our knowing each other better.” Sandra smiled. She turned, opened the door and walked toward hope.

By Paul Joiner—November 1998

(adapted by Barbara Roberts Pine)